

BICYCLE SAFETY

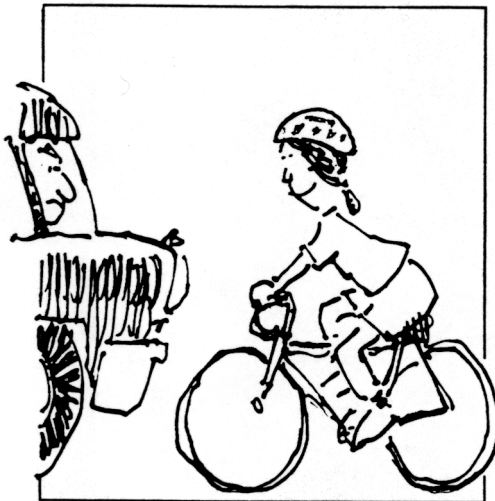
What every parent should know

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Bicycling is fun, it helps us keep fit, and gives us mobility. For kids, the bicycle is the first vehicle, a source of pride, and...it can lead to serious accidents and injury. The attitudes you, as a parent, instill in your child *now* will determine how he or she will ride for years to come. If you work at it, if you teach your child as if his or her life depended on the lessons—which it does—then you will feel more confident when he or she rides out of the driveway.

First things first

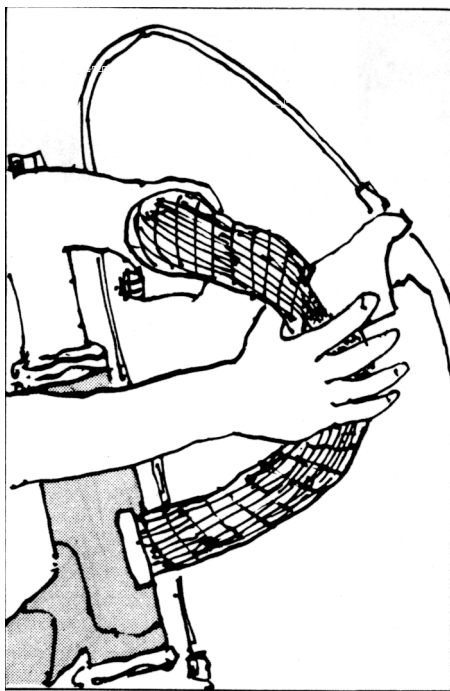
First, however, let's see what *your* safety 'IQ' is. The following are common attitudes parents have about bicycling. Each of them leads to accidents.



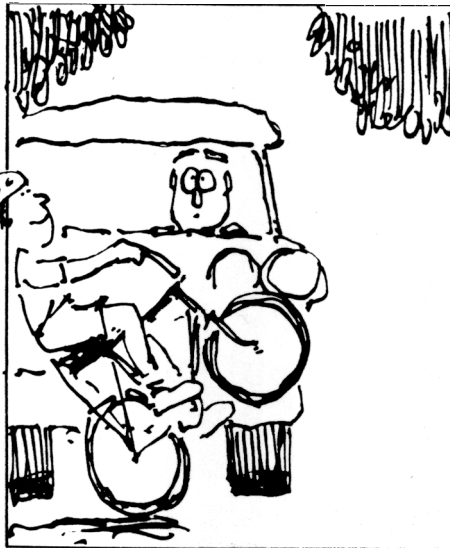
"*Bicyclists should ride facing traffic.*" This common myth is responsible for about 23% of all car/bike collisions. Riding against traffic puts the bicyclists where motorists least expect them. Unpredictability is the result and many bicyclists—particularly kids—are hurt because of it.



"*My child needs a bike he/she can grow into.*" That's the last thing your child needs. Young kids have enough trouble controlling a bike the right size. Put them on a big bike and they wobble and weave down the road. Your child should be able to straddle his or her bike with both feet flat on the ground.



"*My child wants a ten-speed, so I guess I'll get one for her/him.*" It may be hard to buck the trend towards buying youngsters ten-speed bikes but think of it this way: young hands often can't make handbrakes work. Ask a ten year old how he or she stops a ten speed and the answer will probably be one of the following: "I drag my feet." "I run it into something." "I don't stop." Unless you want to make sure the bike you buy has high quality handbrakes with levers made for small hands, you're better off getting your child a bike with a coaster brake. Maybe later, a ten speed will be in order.



"*My child only rides around the neighborhood so I don't worry.*" You should. The majority of bike accidents happen near home. Further, a large percentage of the fatal car/bike collisions happen on two-lane streets with speed limits under 30mph. Does that sound like your neighborhood street? It may be. Often, we forget safety when we ride in familiar surroundings and that is what leads to trouble.

How old is old enough?

There is no 'magic age' at which a bicyclist becomes safe. Some ten year olds are accomplished road users, while some adult riders are 'accidents looking to happen.' Nevertheless, it can be said that before the age of ten, few kids can really understand traffic. They can be taught certain specific skills but they will have trouble understanding concepts like "right-of-way."

If you are an experienced cyclist, you can take your child out for training rides. Such an approach has been known to work with very young kids but, alas, there aren't that many parents out there who are skilled bicyclists. If you aren't one of the 'lucky few,' the best thing to do is to lay down some iron-clad rules and to help your child learn some specific lessons. First, the rules:

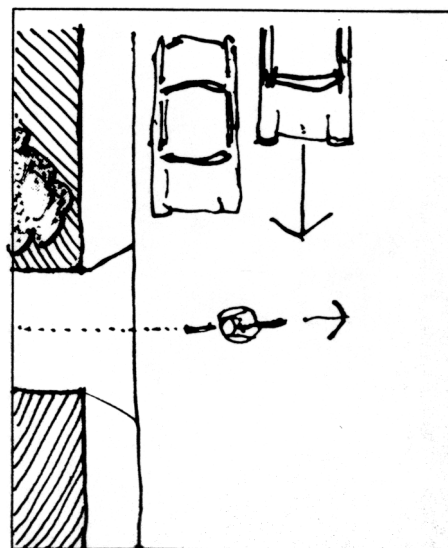
1. No playing on the road.
2. No riding on busy streets.
3. No riding at night.
4. Stop for all stop signs.
5. Ride on the right *with* traffic.
6. Make your own decisions.

As for the lessons, they are given in the following section and each one relates to a *real* problem that children have riding their bikes.

Accident facts

Now that we've exposed some myths, let's look at what *really* happens out on the road. First, the majority of bike accidents do *not* involve cars. Most are falls, collisions with stationary objects, collisions with other bikes or collisions with pedestrians.

Fortunately, most of these accidents aren't serious but they can be. Bike riders have been killed running into posts or hitting each other. But by and large, the most serious accidents are car/bike collisions. The following are the most common:



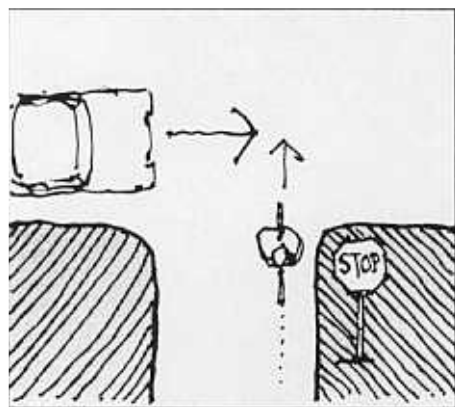
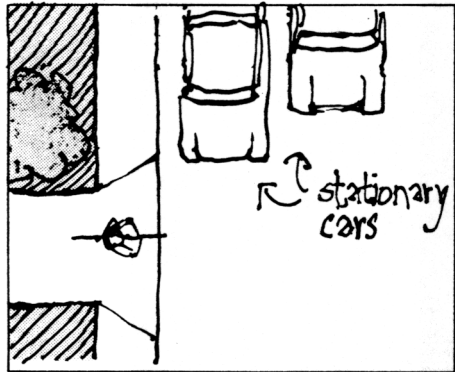
1. *Driveway rideout:* When a youngster rides out of the driveway and gets hit by a car, that's a 'rideout' accident. This type accounts for about 8% of all car/bike collisions and it gets kids early: the median age is *less than ten*.

What you can do: First, realize the danger of your own driveway. If there are obstructions to the view of passing motorists (like bushes or trees) trim them back. You might park your car *in front of the driveway*, if local ordinance permits. This way, your child can't use it as a launching pad.

The most important thing you can do, however is to teach your child about driveway safety. Take your child outside to the driveway and have him or her practice the following steps:

1. Stop before entering the street.
2. Scan left, right and left for traffic.
3. If there's no traffic, proceed into the roadway.

After this practice, set up the situation shown in the diagram below. Have the child alternately ride out of the driveway in front of the 'approaching car' and sit in the driver's seat while a friend rides out of the driveway. Have him or her talk about what happens when a bicyclist rides out of the driveway without stopping or looking. Some play-acting might help get the point across too: pretend the car is moving.

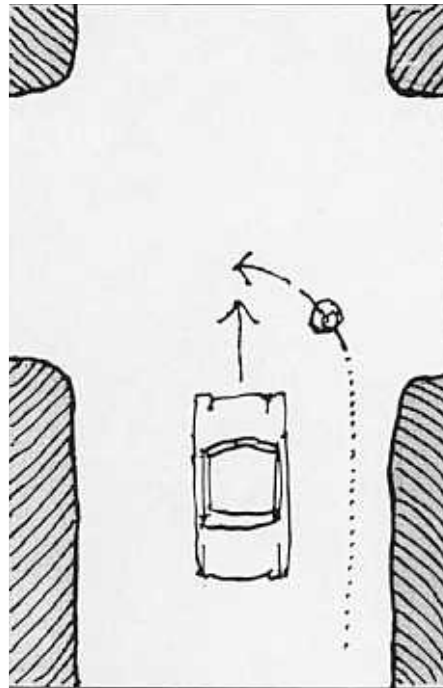


2. Running the stop sign: About ten percent of the car/bike crashes happen when the bicyclist runs a stop sign. It happens to fairly young kids, too: the median age is about eleven. Oddly enough, most of the riders who get hit riding through stop signs *know* that they are supposed to stop. They just don't see *why*...or they get distracted. The thing to impress upon your child is that, while he or she may not get hit every time, running stop signs will eventually result in an accident.

What you can do: Take your child to a stop sign near home. Explain what it means emphasizing the following points:

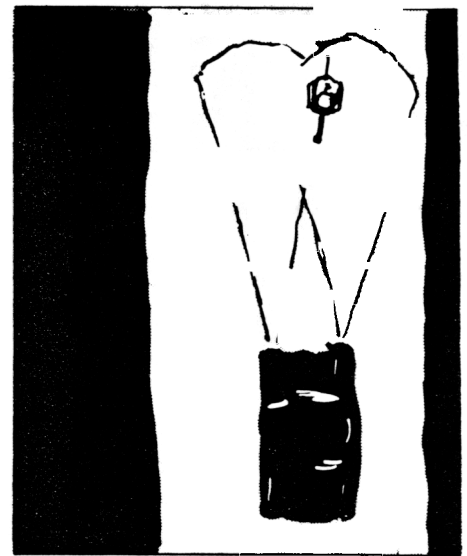
1. Stop at all stop signs regardless of what is happening.
2. Scan both directions for traffic.
3. Wait for any cross traffic to clear.
4. Proceed when safe.

In order to make this lesson stick, you may have to change your own riding or driving habits, though. If you creep through stop sign controlled intersections, the child will pick this up and learn that you don't really believe what you preach. For your child's sake, stop at stop signs.



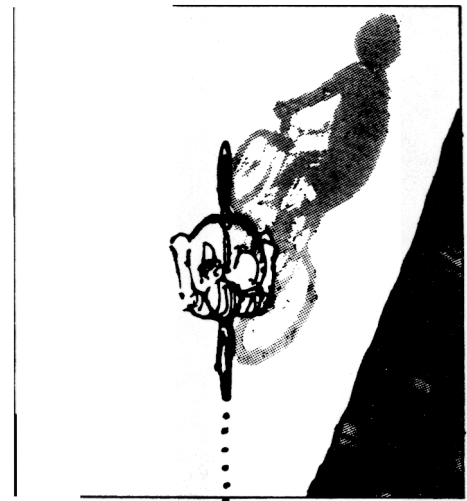
3. Turning without warning: Another major accident type involves bicyclists who make unexpected left turns. They neither scan behind for traffic nor do they signal. This accident type accounts for about 10% of all car/bike collisions and the median age is about twelve years. The key factor here is *neglecting to scan to the rear*. If the cyclists had looked, they would have seen the cars coming up from behind.

What you can do: Of course, you ought to teach your child to walk across busy streets—at least until he or she has had some advanced training and is old enough to understand traffic. But in the meantime, for residential street riding, you can teach your child to *always scan and signal before turning left*. A big part of this lesson is teaching the child *how* to scan to the rear without swerving. Take the child to a playground to practice riding along a straight paint line while scanning behind. Stand alongside and hold up two fingers on your hand after the child rides by. Call his or her name. After fifteen minutes of practice a ten year old should be able to look behind and identify how many fingers you are holding up—all without swerving!

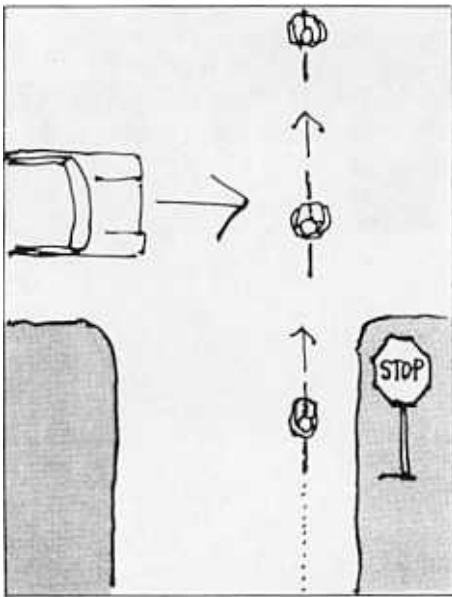


4. Night-time riding: Certain types of accidents happen most often after dark. For example, most crashes in which a car coming up from the rear hits a bike while overtaking happen at night. These 'overtaking' accidents can be very serious. About 25% of all fatal car/bike collisions are of this type. Most, however, involve older cyclists; the median age is about twenty years.

What you can do: First, you can rule out night-riding for your youngster. It requires special skills and special equipment. Few kids have either. Make your child understand that, if he or she gets caught out after dark on a bike, the only thing to do is to call you for a ride home. Maybe you could tape 'phone money' to the bike so that, in an emergency, your child would be able to call.



For adults or teenagers, night-riding can be done safely. The first requirement is to use *bright* lights and reflectors, and to wear light-colored clothing with reflective tape. The second requirement is to remember this tip: at night, watch your shadow in the headlights of overtaking cars. If your shadow moves to the right as the car approaches from the rear, this means it is moving left to pass you. If your shadow stays right in front of you, it means the car is headed straight for you. Get out of the way!



5. Following the leader: Many car/bike collisions take place when children are following each other. The first one may run a stop sign and get through. The second one may get hit. Several different accident types involve this 'group think' behavior and it is hard to counter.

What you can do: Teach your child to always assess the traffic situation for him or herself. When a group is riding around, each cyclist should stop for stop signs. Each one should scan to the rear before making left turns. One good way to get this message across is to play a game with the child similar to "Simon Says." In this game, however, the emphasis should be on *not* doing what Simon says but making a decision based on the situation. For example, you may position your child at the driveway and say "Simon says ride out" when cars are coming and when they are not. The child should learn to ignore what "Simon Says." (Of course, you should be in a position to grab the child before he or she does ride out just in case!)



What about helmets?

Helmets can save lives. About 75% of all bicyclists who die each year die from head injuries. Many more are permanently impaired as the result of hitting their heads. Whether you buy a bike helmet for your child is up to you but the cost (\$25-35) is awfully small when compared with the medical bills and possible grief from a head injury. Go with a hard-shell bike helmet; there are several available in kids' sizes.



When should these lessons be taught?

In general, the earlier the better. While the *median* age of most of the bike accidents discussed is about ten years, this means that *half of the bicyclists involved were younger than ten*. Only you know how much your child can understand but the lessons on "driveway rideouts" and "running the stop sign" ought to be taught early: five to seven would be about right. For kids younger than that, it may be best to make them ride on the sidewalk and walk across the street if they have to cross.

By age nine or ten, a child will be able to handle some of the more advanced ideas like making safe left turns on residential streets. This should not, however, keep you from teaching your child to scan behind without swerving. Such skills require practice and need to be taught at an early age.

Other available materials:

Bicycle Forum can supply you with safety posters, pamphlets, bumper stickers, and more. We are producing new materials all the time.

About Bicycle Forum

Bicycle Forum is a non-profit corporation dedicated to encouraging safer bicycling and greater use of the bicycle. We put out a magazine that has, in the past few years, earned an international reputation as the best "serious" bicycle publication on the market. We cover the "Four E's": Education, Engineering, Enforcement, and Encouragement. Most people in the US (and many abroad) involved in bicycle program work read or write for *Bicycle Forum*.

Education Programs

If you are interested in seeing bicycle safety taught in your schools, *Bicycle Forum* can steer you towards the best programs available. Currently, we know of excellent bicycle safety courses available for all levels. Ask for our "Bibliography of Bike Education" (\$1.00 postage paid).

Provided by:

City of Columbus



Public Service Department
Traffic Engineering and
Parking Division
Bikeway Coordinator
109 N. Front Street
645-8079

Recreation and Parks Department
200 Greenlawn Avenue
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